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BOOK REVIEW / Arnold Beichman

Stalin's master Tokyo spy

His prophetic reports went unheeded in the Kremlin

Josef Stalin was probably the most successful spymaster in history, because he ran major espionage rings in three capitalist countries which to him represented powerful enemies of his Marxist-Leninist revolution and its expansionist ambitions.

Stalin had major espionage operations in other countries as well, such as the one in Canada, which thanks to the late Igor Gouzenko was finally, but never quite fully, exposed at the end of World War II.

In those days, recruitment into Stalin's secret service was customarily via membership in the Communist Party. In the United States, there was the Red network and its subsystems, the most prominent members of which were Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs and "agents of influence" concentrated in the Institute for Pacific Relations. In Great Britain, there was the Soviet spy ring which planted Kim Philby and lesser apostles in powerful positions within the intelligence community, both before and after World War II. Last, there was the spy ring run by Richard Sorge, a Russian-German Communist.

For the most part, these ring members were true believers, ideological spies; that is, they believed that communism represented the wave of the future and accepted Stalin's concept of "proletarian internationalism," defined as primary loyalty to the Soviet Union as the country of revolution.

Sorge's success can be measured by the fact that in probably the most spy-conscious nation in the world after the Soviet Union, namely Japan, a country which swarmed with informers, his ring successfully penetrated, from 1933 until his arrest in 1941, almost every level of this putatively closed society.

And as a topper, despite the hyper-suspicious Gestapo and despite his Russian birthplace, he penetrated the German Embassy in Tokyo, all the while living it up with a Japanese mistress and vast amounts of alcohol. He somehow managed to provide for his Nazi-run newspaper, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, long reports on the politics of China and Japan, and for Stalin secret information on every conceivable subject that the intelligence directorate of the Soviet Red Army demanded.

This long and detailed book about Sorge's life and times is neither light nor felicitous reading. In fact, its pages are replete with clichés — brains click like computers, news hounds bay, fates are sealed. Yet it is a fascinating case history of highly intelligent men and women conspiring in acts of treason and betrayal in the name of a so-called higher truth, embodied by Marxism-Leninism. Their rewards were few except for what might be some intellectual satisfaction that they were building a better tomorrow with the aid of one of the great mass murderers of all time.

Although the U.S.S.R. did nothing to help Sorge when he was arrested or to prevent his execution by the Japanese in 1944, the Kremlin in time made up for the dereliction. Twenty years later, a street in Baku was named for him, his face was put on a postage stamp, he was declared Hero of the Soviet Union, and a biography of his exploits was published.

The real question, which the book helps answer, is what good did all this spying for Stalin do? As much as it is possible to confirm, there is a widespread belief that Stalin ignored his master spy who revealed weeks before it happened the date of the Nazi invasion of the U.S.S.R. — June 22, 1941. This would account for the signal lack of preparation by the Red Army for such an invasion.

What is now clear is that Stalin may have had some reason for ignoring Sorge.

It turns out that a key member of Sorge's ring, the radio operator, had taken it upon himself, starting in autumn 1940, not only to edit Sorge's messages but on many occasions to refuse to transmit them at all, without telling Sorge, who simply assumed that the Fourth Directorate of the Red Army was getting everything he sent. The authors estimate that from 1940 on between one-half to two-thirds of the material which Sorge gave his radio operator was never transmitted to Moscow. The radio operator didn't send it because he had become a non-Communist for reasons that are not quite clear.

In other words, what might have been persuasive, had the highly detailed Sorge file been received in Moscow on a regular basis, did not seem so persuasive without the master spy's logical sequence and analysis of events. To Stalin, Sorge's discrete dispatches might have appeared no different from the gossip he was receiving from Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt about Hitler's imminent invasion, which he disbelieved.

Sorge has also been credited with another intelligence scoop, namely his absolute certainty that the Japanese army would head south against British and American interests in the Pacific rather than north to Siberia to save Irkutsk, thereby risking the fall of Moscow.

What then was the value of the Sorge ring? Perhaps it was that in the early years of his espionage, Sorge kept Stalin informed on an

Target Tokyo: The Story of the Sorge Spy Ring
By Gordon W. Prange,
with Donald M. Goldstein
and Katherine V. Dillon
McGraw Hill, \$24.95, 595 pages

Continued

almost day-to-day basis about the German-Japanese negotiations which finally led to the Axis pact, or that he could give Stalin an insight into the minds of Hitler and the Japanese ruling groups.

The ultimate question about the uses of intelligence is: What does the consumer do with it when he receives it from his agent, especially when the consumer always has to worry whether his man has been turned into a double agent? That is why counterintelligence is so important in the intelligence structure. The Japanese inability to cope with the Sorge ring for almost a decade may well have been caused by a failure of its counterintelligence staffs.

In any case, for anyone interested in the significance of intelligence input into foreign policy decision-making, *Target Tokyo* is must reading. The senior author of this work, Professor Gordon W. Prange, died in the course of writing the book, which is a great loss, since he was also the senior author of two other pieces of Pacific history, *At Dawn We Slept* and *Miracle at Midway*.